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ABSTRACT

On a budget of $28,000, Child Protection, Inc. has a paid staff of an executive director, 4 foster grandparents, and 3 VISTA volunteers. But with the help of 157 volunteer servide providers, the organization is able to deliver 828 units of service monthly to rural Western Kentucky. The success of the volunteer program is based on recruiting from appropriate populations, screening, specific and meaningful job descriptions, supervision, training, evaluation, recognition, integration into the agency, and supportive relations with peers. Volunteers participate in the agency's three strategies for preventing child abuse--a Parents Anonymous Chapter, Wee Care (a mothers' cooperative "time out" nursery), and parent aides. Because the volunteers' services to clients are accepted, they have become the backbone of Child Protection, attracting a broad base of community support and thereby making the agency eligible for grants and city, county, and United Way funding. This report contains background information on the economic and social problems that have led to high rates of child abuse and neglect in western Kentucky. The history and evolution of Child Protection is described, stressing the volunteer program, but also including the issues of public education, public relations, community support, interagency cooperation, multidisciplinary professional teams, and civic group involvement. (JHZ)

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THE ROLE OF VOLUNTEERS IN PREVENTING RURAL CHILD ABUSE

by

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Among the states, Kentucky has historically ranked high in poverty, high in social problems, and low in services. Western Kentucky is characterized primarily by rural communities clustered around more urban centers with populations of 30,000 to 50,000 people. With the influx of industry to the small urban centers, there has been a migration of the younger generation to towns to avail themselves of employment opportunities. This migration has brought many social problems as rural people have found it difficult to adapt to new lifestyles. The small urban centers are hard pressed to meet the social service needs of these new citizens as resource development lags behind population growth.

Weber (1976) describes "rural" areas as having simplistic social structures, preferences for informal relationships and significant importance placed on the family and such institutions as schools and churches. In this catchment area there is historical substantiation of these institutional supports. As family kinships are disbursed by a migration to the urban centers and changes in work patterns, these families from rural backgrounds find their institutional supports are no longer available to them. They are reluctant to form new support systems and new methods of coping.

Compounding the natural complexity of working in a rural environment was the economic plight of the state and its consequences for the social services system.

State finances were imperiled since the legislature had overestimated the revenue generated by the coal severance tax in formulating the state budget. To compensate for the error, whole programs of services were eliminated, including the state social services training branch and specialists, and all employees who had not worked for the state as long as six months were terminated. Caseloads increased dramatically, and morale among state workers collapsed; no longer was professional competence, merit status, or work performance a guarantee of security in employment.

In 1977, a critical deficit between increased environmental demands and changing family support systems became evident. This deficit was exemplified by high rates of child abuse and neglect. Resistance to changes promulgated by urbanization compounded already existing problems of ignorance, poverty, and paucity of resources. The dispersion of the needy, coupled with lack of public transportation, made delivery of services especially difficult. Resistance to agency services and reliance on the family are cultural phenomena in rural communities, (Skaggs, 1971). Rural people, who place great value on their independence, self reliance, and privacy, were finding their personal needs in conflict with the lack of social supports in the urban environment, Weber, 1976).

In response to this situation a group of professionals employed by state and local human service agencies began meeting bi-monthly to determine what, if anything, they could do within the community to prevent the problem of child abuse. None of the members claimed any experience or educational background in social planning. Their immediate superiors gave them released time for their endeavors and charged them with developing community resources without tapping state funds. As a start toward formalization, they took the name Child Protection and elected a chairperson.

These professionals looked both within the community and at other communities to define those services which would ameliorate the staggering abuse problems. The group went to a similarly populated community to learn about a parent aide/friendly visitor program which had been operational for a year. Parents Anonymous was researched, and some of the group met with its founder, Jolly K. Protective service workers were also polled as to what resources they felt would be helpful to their clients.

It was affirmed that families were in need of support services - programs or projects that would supplement familial resources rather than supplant them. At one time, extended family support systems provided such essential services as babysitting, consoling and advising, and nursing through illnesses; but, due to mobility and/or family breakdown, many families no longer had this kind of support available to them, (Wilson, 1981). This breakdown in family functioning leads to stress, and accumulated stress can lead to child abuse, (Cohen, 1981).

It also became immediately apparent that child abuse is a community problem and requires a community working together to take preventive steps. Educating the public, therefore, in and of itself was identified as a primary need to be a forerunner of the development of community resources. The first project undertaken was an educational seminar designed to arouse public interest and assess which prevention goals would be accepted by the populace. Entitled "Child Care and Protection: Whose Responsibility?" the seminar brought humanities professors together with experts from the legal, medical, and social work professions to address the etiological, cultural, preventive, and treatment aspects of child abuse.

The seminar succeeded on two fronts. Because a women's civic organization co-sponsored it, the membership worked hard to make the seminar successful by publicizing the event and insuring attendance. These women became more knowledgable of the problem itself and the needs of potentially abusive parents. As leaders in the community, they had a powerful voice in lobbying the power structure. The attendant publicity regarding child abuse attracted numerous persons and/organizations, heretofore unconcerned, wanting to volunteer their time and resources. For example, the public library started a summer program to educate latency-aged children as to what constitutes child abuse, what protection under the law these children have, and what steps they can take to protect themselves.

Subsequent to the seminar, Child Protection was incorporated and three programmatic objectives were established as pilot projects:

1) the establishment of a Parent Anonymous Chapter,
2) the creation of a mother's time outnursery, hereafter referred to as Wee Care, and
3) the recruitment and training of parent aides.

Funding for these programs was provided by a woman's civic organization. Common to all three projects were limited funding, no paid staff, resistance among potential consumers and the power structure, and no available resources or equipment. Board members self-selected programs to work on and began mobilizing support by developing networks within the community, recruiting and training volunteers, soliciting needed equipment, and sponsoring a media blitz as to the purposes and needs of the programs.

The response from the community was heartening. Board members contacted personnel from the human services agencies and the judiciary system personally, and this approach resulted in referrals to the appropriate programs. The television and radio stations were cooperative in providing valuable air time in running public service announcements and featuring board members as speakers on programs relating to community concerns. A church donated space for the Parents Anonymous meetings, and Headstart made a classroom available for Wee Care. Drives to acquire needed toys and equipment were singlularly successful. Practicum students from the Social Work Program were trained and invested with the responsibility of managing the children's programs. Other professionals not formally connected with Child Protection volunteered their time to sponsor Parents Anonymous and supervise

the parent aides. Networking, begun out of necessity, laid the foundation of interagency cooperation and planning, which has been a governing credo of the board.

As full-time employees of other agencies, the board members' responsibilities to Child Protection had become too burdensome, and funding for an executive director was secured by a grant. The director worked to further legitimate the agency's position in the community. Numerous speaking engagements at civic clubs helped to educate the public about child abuse and the community's responsibility for prevention. Audiences responded with cash and in-kind donations as well as by volunteering their services. By the end of the director's first year of employment, all the programs were showing growth; the board committees were active and well focused; and, the agency application had been accepted by United Way.

During 1981, the agency experienced a reversal which could have had dire consequences. Community-based work-study students, donated by the mental health center in return for respite care for developmentally disabled children, were terminated by the University as a result of federal cutbacks. These students had been in charge of supervising Wee Care which was staffed by volunteers. Without these students the board had to choose between confining the director to the nursery thirty hours a week, which would weaken the other programs, or make adjustments in the operation of the nursery.

The latter course was decided upon. A practicum student was assigned the task of converting Wee Care from a drop-in center to a mother's cooperative. A token system was initiated with the mothers donating one hour of service for every four hours of babysitting. The mothers received training in child management techniques for the nursery which, they quickly learned, also worked in the home. The mothers now meet bimonthly to discuss the operation of the center and utilize much of the time to function as a mutual support group. As a preventive program, Wee Care in this framework is meeting the needs of parents and children more comprehensively than it would as a drop-in nursery.

Developing a Volunteer Program

On a budget of $28,000, Child Protection has a paid staff of an executive director, 4 foster grandparents, and 3 VISTA volunteers. Yet, monthly the agency is delivering 828 units of service, or rather, the 157 volunteer service providers are. Child Protection is "high" on volunteers and has found the following program successful for a rural area.

The Child Protection volunteer program evolved out of response to specific task needs. In retrospect, the programs became successful (as opposed to functional) when volunteers were recruited from appropriate populations, screened, given specific and meaningful job descriptions, supervised, and evaluated. Success was insured when volunteers made a firm commitment to the agency. We quickly learned that volunteers require access to the same supports as paid staff-plus acceptance and integration into agency management and peer relations.

Recruitment

The first step in recruiting volunteers is to decide what jobs need to be done. Child Protection uses volunteers in every aspect of the agency from professional consultation to janitorial services. Once a list of program tasks is completed, these tasks can be grouped or categorized into job descriptions. Job descriptions enhance the recruitment process, make volunteer selection easier, facilitate matching volunteer skills to benefit the agency, are effective training tools and contribute to an honest and fair performance evaluation.

Child Protection makes every effort to promote an image of a

positive, caring and and worthwhile agency in order to attract quality volunters. Staff and volunteers speak frequently to civic groups, homemakers groups, university and high schools classes in an effort to educate the public to children's needs and services offered by the agency. We use all media available appearing frequently on radio and television not only to tell about Child Protection services, but to speak out on current issues involving families. Fliers, brochures and newsletters are distributed regularly. Our best recruiting resource has been our own volunteers who share their experiences with friends and family.

Volunteer applications are indispensable screening tools. We try to discern the reason why an applicant has chosen to volunteer in the area of child abuse and neglect. Some volunteers come to child abuse programs out of unrequited needs in their own past. A volunteer, for example, who was abused as a child may want to help another child avoid such a situation. It is important to assess the degree of resolution such an applicant brings to the volunteer position. Another may come in response to a "horror story" in the newspaper and want to shield children from parents they consider to be monsters. By far, our greatest successes have come from volunteers who have a realistic understanding of how difficult it can be for parents to raise children. Each volunteer must face the problem of setting aside

personal feelings and values and adopting the skills and training provided by the agency.

Training and Supervision

Every volunteer receives orientation to the agency, orientation to program assignment, and training in the knowledge and skill base required for their job. Every effort is made to impress volunteers with the importance of their positions and the need for regular attendance. They are shown their work stations, introduced to staff and other volunteers, and told whom they may rely on for support.

Training focuses on four areas: 1) volunteer rights and responsibilities; 2) ethics and values; 3) child abuse and related knowledge; and 4) skill development. The volunteer's liabilities are made known as well as the rights regarding supervision, case assignments, etc. A discussion of ethics and values brings to light potential personal conflicts with agency mission, methods, and/or target population. Confidentiality is discussed thoroughly as are penalities for divulging such information. The dynamics of child abuse are explored as are the needs of families and child development. Volunteers are taught basic communication skills and techniques of behavior management, parent training, etc., as is relevant to their job description.

Supervision is provided both individually and in groups of peer volunteers. The purposes are to foster the continuing growth and skill development of the volunteers, problem solving, opportunity for the supervisor to provide direction, and provision of support and encouragement to the volunteer. Supervisors should ask and really care about the volunteer's welfare. They may be reluctant to voice problems to professional staff, or they may be unable to identify feelings and needs. For volunteers, support is the vehicle that conveys how important their job is and encourages them to do their best. Constructive feedback is the foundation of integrating the volunteer into the agency and is the vehicle for enhancing self-awareness. "If I am to be given an important role, I want to be told when I am doing the job well, and more important, when I am not, (Hanlon, 1980, P. 109)

Child Protection provides supervision within each program. Volunteers from each program meet monthly with their coworkers. Parents Anonymous leaders, child care workers and support staff discuss program policy and the progress of each family. Wee Care volunteers and staff discuss children with behavior problems and design activities for the ensuing month. Parent Aides share their experiences with their consultant, and they hear a speaker

from either a local agency or an expert in the field. Attendance at supervisory conferences is mandatory.

Recognition and Retention

Paid staff are fueled by regular rewards - pay checks, fringe benefits, and agency support. Every agency using volunteers is challenged to satisfy them equally with alternatives to financial compensation. Volunteers surveyed indicated the following reasons for volunteering which are listed according to priority: contact with other volunteers/co-workers; training opportunities; professional supervision; contact with professionals; and lastly, all those tools most often thought of for volunteer recognition - letters of appreciation, banquets, pins, etc, (Wilson, M., 1980). Satisfaction with the volunteer experience is directly related to positive experiences with people they work with rather than tokens.

Child Protection maximizes every opportunity for volunteers to interact with each other and staff at every level of the organization. Volunteers are invited to board meetings when appropriate, and picnics are sponsored so that the board members and volunteers can mix. Rather than banquets, informal brunches, etc. are held in the homes of board, staff, or volunteers. Volunteer supervisors form personal as well as

professional relationships with the volunteers. As the volunteer is drawn more into the inner circle," his/her dedication increases.

All volunteers are recognized formally at least annually. They receive a token, such as a certificate, pin or placque. The board also designates a volunteer or community member who has made a significant contribution to children's welfare as the Child Protection "Guardian Angel." These activities are useful and appreciated when coupled with warm interpersonal relationships. Tokens when used should be espoused as just that - tokens - since a pin or certificate can never adequately compensate volunteer staff for its efforts.

Benefits Derived from Volunteer Contributions

Through the hard work of the board, executive director, staff, and volunteers, Child Protection has become one of the major service providers to families and children in the community. The members of the board of directors have charged the executive director with responsibility for public relations, fund raising, grantsmanship, oversight, supervision, and interagency collaboration. The efficient use of volunteers has made possible the development of new services which otherwise would have been impossible due to finances and personnel shortages.

Building blocks, and educational program originally funded b a grant from a Kentucky foundation, was added as a service in 1982. Staff consists of four volunteers: a pediatrician, masters degree social worker, a registered nurse, and a psychologist. This team teaches prospective parents about parenting from a socio-medical perspective. Participants are recruited through obstetricians' offices, public health department, public welfare department, Lamaz classes, and the community mental health center as well as the usual media advertisements. The county hospital has agreed to show a parenting film on closed circuit television to new mothers and solicit prospective participants through use of their patient representatives. The long range goal of this program is to intervene with high risk mothers with a preventive educational package.

The agency is the recipient of a state grant to begin August, 1984; the purpose of this grant is also parent education, but the participants will be protective service parents referred by the state child welfare authority and very probably court-ordered. This grant appropriates sufficient revenues to employ a Ph.D. psychologist as consultant, three psychology graduate students, and one clerical worker.

A woman's civic group has designated Child Protection as a

recipient of monies to fund an educational program to combat the problem of missing and exploited children. The goal for the coming year is to show the film and lead discussion in every elementary classroom and to community groups. School counselors will be trained to facilitate discussion following the film. The Bowling Green Police Department has asked to co-sponser this project and has assigned a juvenile officer to the project.

To promote interagency collaboration, the executive director of Child Protection is also the coordinator of the Multidisciplinary Team on Child Abuse and Neglect. On the original task force fourteen persons representing various agencies serving children determined the purposes and developed the mechanisms of referral, screening, and authority of the team. The team itself consists volunteers experts from the following fields: law, medicine, casework, child development, and family therapy. The board has also encouraged the director's membership in Independent Child Abuse and Neglect Network, the Kentucky Chapter of the National Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse, and her work in a neighboring county to establish an agency similar to Child Protection.

It is difficult to say how much or how little the agency could have accomplished without the volunteers. Volunteers

represent the agency to both its clients and the community as a whole. They are a vital link in a self-perpetuating cycle; they serve clients and, because of their acceptance, the services are valued as worthwhile thereby attracting community support. The agency has a vehicle for becoming known in the community - to recruit new volunteers, to attract sponsors, to be eligible for grants, to receive city, county and United Way funding. Volunteers are the backbone of Child Protection, and it is a pleasure for the authors to do them honor.

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